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Samsung Spills The Milk With Its New Streaming Service

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Just what the world needs, another streaming service. Samsung recently announced that it launched a free online streaming music service that's only available in the US and on its Galaxy phones. The service is called Milk Music, and offers over 200 curated streaming channels free of charge to Samsung customers.

Milk Music is certainly a curious name (although it does bring the widely known "Got Milk?" campaign by the American Dairy Association to mind), but you have to wonder why Samsung would even dream of entering a space with such low margins and high competition. Okay, I can think of some.

First of all, Samsung didn't have to build the infrastructure for the service, relying instead on Slacker Radio to provide the backbone. This is actually a good strategic move for Slacker closer in that it moves it closer to its major competitor Pandora, while Samsung gets Milk users to stay within the controlled Galaxy environment, at least at first. Being powered by Slacker also takes Samsung off the hook for any expensive licensing deals with the labels. That much makes sense.

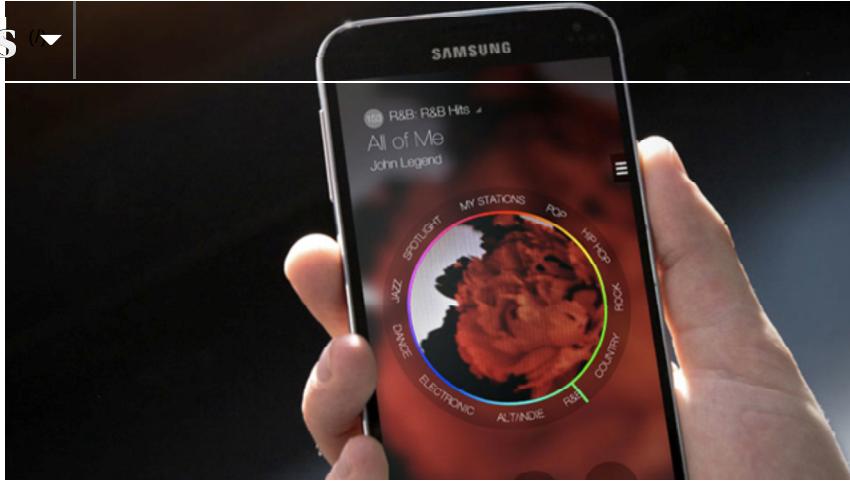


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(Credit: Samsung Milk Music)

But that's where it also gets curious. One of the things about non-interactive radio-style streaming services is that you're not supposed to be able to skip a song, rewind it, or choose what you want. Milk Music is somewhat of a hybrid in that you get six skips per hour, can choose to "Never Play" a particular song, and can listen to a previously played song from a list of the last 500 aired. This obviously straddles the line between interactive and non-interactive, with each paying a different royalty rate. Are we seeing yet another streaming category emerging?

Although the back-end of Milk Music is Slacker, the user interface is all Samsung, and they've made it as simple as possible, which is a good thing. That said, the audio quality seems to be throttled way back, with settings at only 50kbps or 90kbps, way below the acceptable standard of 192kbps that most services offer. Just this "feature" alone can turn Milk a bit sour (pardon the pun). Yes, the service may be convenient, but why bother when so many free and better sounding equivalent services are available just a touch away?

Then there's the fact that Samsung already offers a subscription music service called Music Hub. Why bother competing with yourself? Milk Music is free and has no advertising yet, so it doesn't generate any revenue, so what's the play here? There's no obvious up-sell yet and the audio quality is marginal so there will probably be listener attrition after a while, so what's the point?

Samsung now has a bit of a history getting involved in short-sighted music ventures (remember the [Jay-Z](http://www.forbes.com/profile/jay-z/) (<http://www.forbes.com/profile/jay-z/>) album exclusive release of his *Magna Carta Holy Grail* release last year?) that don't appear to be part of a long-term strategy. There's little risk in any of them from a corporate standpoint, but they're not doing much for the health and growth of the brand either.

A venture like this has a few things right, and so many that are, shall we say, interesting. Samsung did a great job on the interface design, was smart in its synergy with Slacker, and makes it dead easy for someone to use it. But with degraded audio and no apparent end game, you have to wonder – why?

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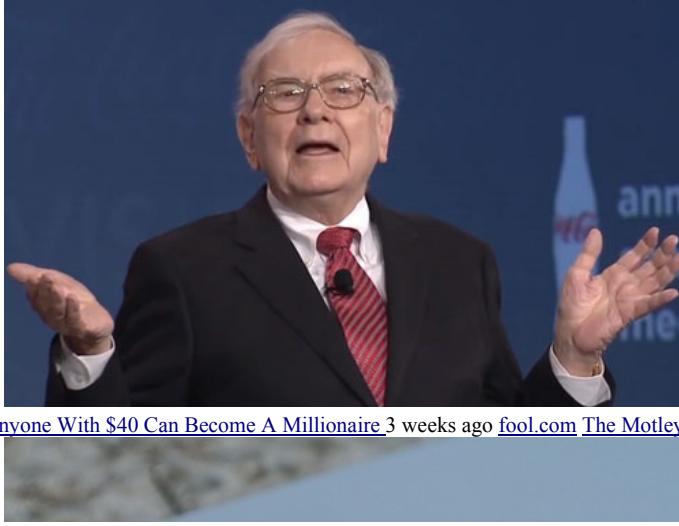
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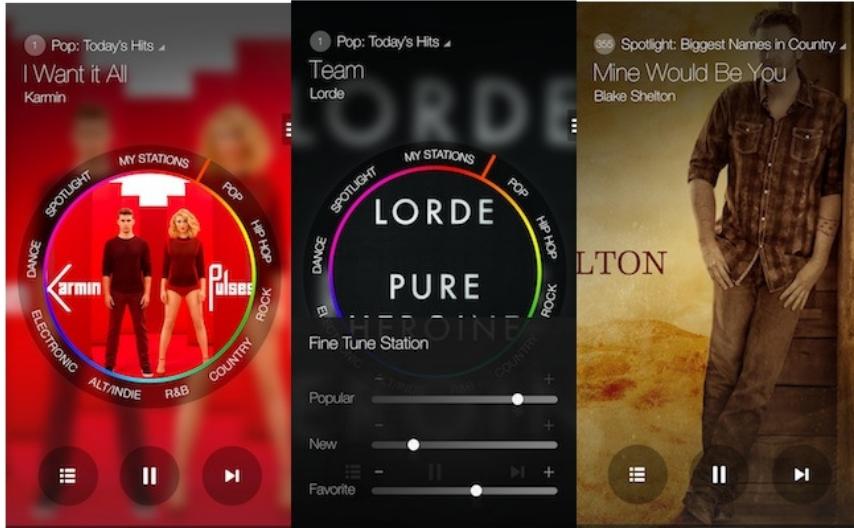


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Samsung Launches Mobile Radio Service Milk Music Ahead of SXSW

By Andrew Hampp | March 07, 2014 1:38 PM EST



Samsung on Friday (March 7) became the latest entrant into the highly active streaming-music category with the introduction of Milk Music, an ad-free radio service distributed exclusively on Galaxy devices for the U.S. The launch arrives on the eve of South By Southwest, where Samsung will have an active yet, at the moment, stealth presence that will include several media events and an as-yet-unannounced concert featuring a hip-hop legend next Saturday, March 15 -- a follow-up to last year's surprise performance starring Prince.

The service is powered by Slacker and requires no username, password or opt-ins. After agreeing to a brief terms of service, users are immediately linked to an FM-like radio deal of genre stations that immediately play topical songs that can go as niche or broad as a user's tastes may skew. (Backpack Rap, with underground suggestions like Doomtree and Mr. Lif? Check. Daytime Dance, featuring new selections from Groove Armada and Two Door Cinema Club? You're covered.) Each station allows six song "skips" per hour, a number that refreshes every time you select a new station. Users can also tweak a station to serve more or less selections based on how much they like a particular song. Click-to-buy links driving to Samsung's Music Hub or the Google Play Store are in the works.

Samsung's mission with Milk was two-fold, says Ryan Bidan, Samsung Mobile's director of product marketing. "We heard from consumers that there were too many ads and interruptions on free services, and that set-up could be a pain with log-ins and navigating spreadsheets," he says. Plus, "we wanted it to be identified as something completely different. We didn't want it to be super corporate or Samsung-y because it's not meant to be. We wanted a name that spoke to how we felt about music inside the application, the idea of being fuzzy and nice -- you know, like mother's milk."

- Samsung's Todd Pendleton on That Game-Changing Jay Z Deal
- Billboard Power 100 2014: No. 68 - Todd Pendleton, Chief Marketing Officer of Samsung North America
- Lorde's 'Royals' Scores Global Samsung Campaign

Milk Music is the result of nearly a year's worth of testing and development led by Daren Tsui, VP of music at Samsung's Media Solutions, who joined the company in 2012 following Samsung's acquisition of his company mSpot. Last spring, Samsung announced a doubling in staff for its Music Hub service, which is also powering Milk. Samsung currently has over 200 million Galaxy users globally, but declined to break out the number of users in the U.S., Milk's exclusive territory for the time being.

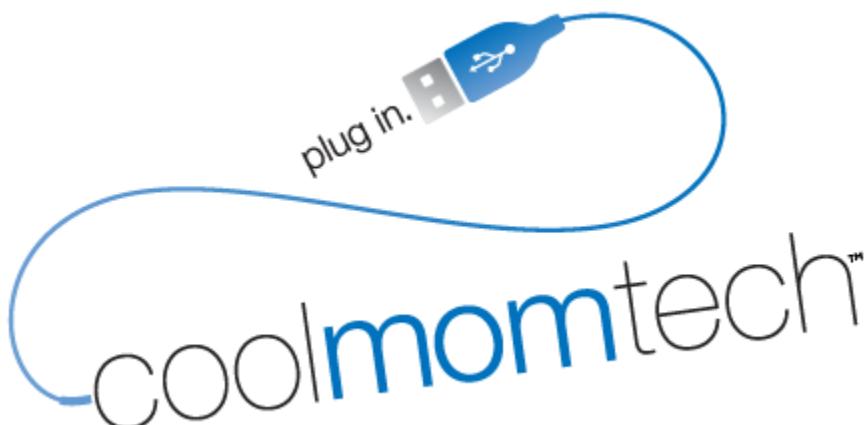
Tsui tells Billboard that Milk Music will also give Samsung fresh incentive to negotiate more Jay Z-like deals with labels and artists, under a Milk station called Spotlight. "We'll be working with the industry from several different angles, from the marketing side and

from a content perspective," he says. "Jay Z was more of a campaign that just came and went, and we understood that and learned from it as we worked with other artists. It makes sense to do not just a one-month campaign that goes away, but a much more integrated strategy. We've been talking to a few of the labels, and of the folks that we talked to they're very excited about this opportunity as they see the promotional possibilities."

Plus, adds Bidan, "this is the first service we've gone out with to market independent of a specific device launch, which speaks to our seriousness about this." SXSW will be the first place where Milk will be marketed, but TV ads and other media buys on par with the launch of, say, Galaxy Gear or last spring's massive S4 launch don't seem to be out of the question for the near future, either. As Samsung CMO Todd Pendleton noted to Billboard in an exclusive Q&A in December, "We're not going to repeat anything we've done before. Right now, anything that could be happening as early as January or February is still in the works."

Samsung estimates that the mobile radio audience is about 50% of the total streaming-music audience across all platforms. The category is currently led by Pandora but in recent months has seen all sorts of new competitors from iTunes Radio in September to Spotify in December, Beats Music in January. Spotify and Beats both made headlines this week with a pair of acquisitions -- the Echo Nest and Topspin, respectively -- and will each have a presence at SXSW next week alongside iTunes, which will host its first-ever U.S. iTunes Festival Tuesday through Saturday.

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Samsung Milk Music app keeps it fresh and free (and presumably organic) in the online music space

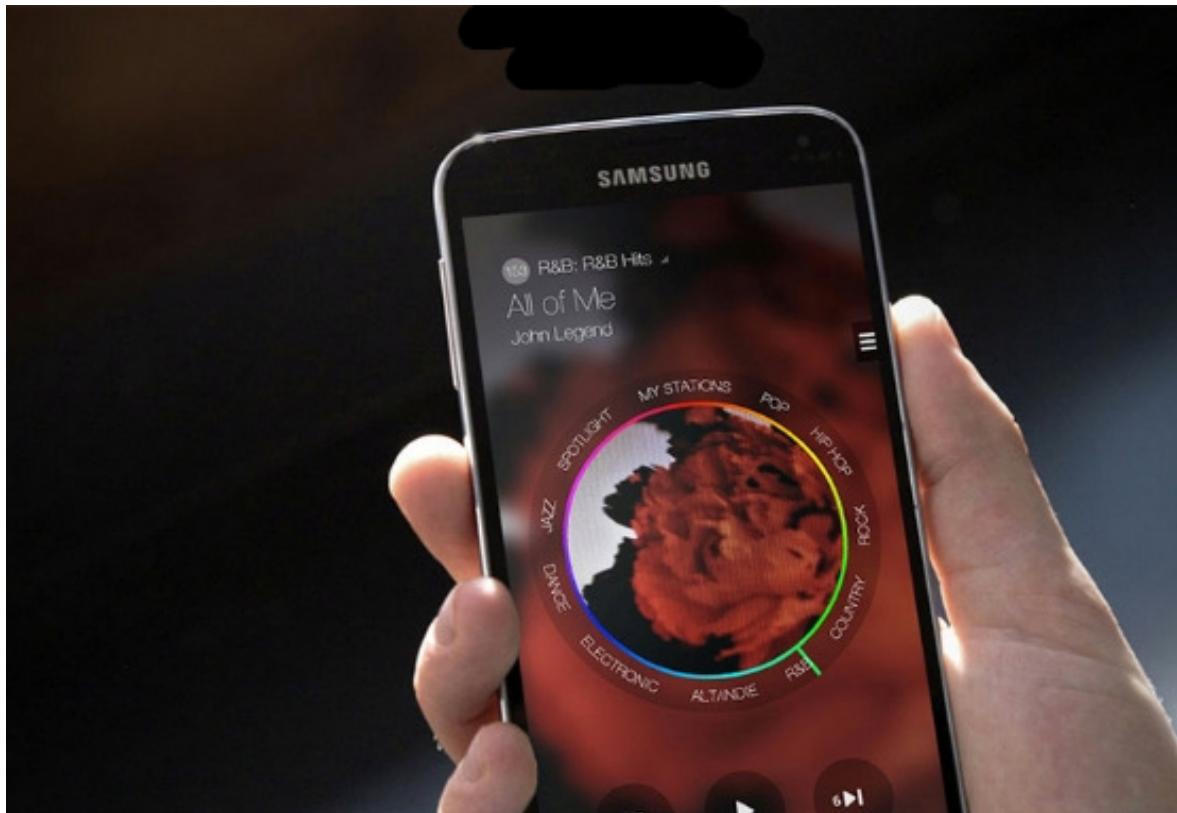




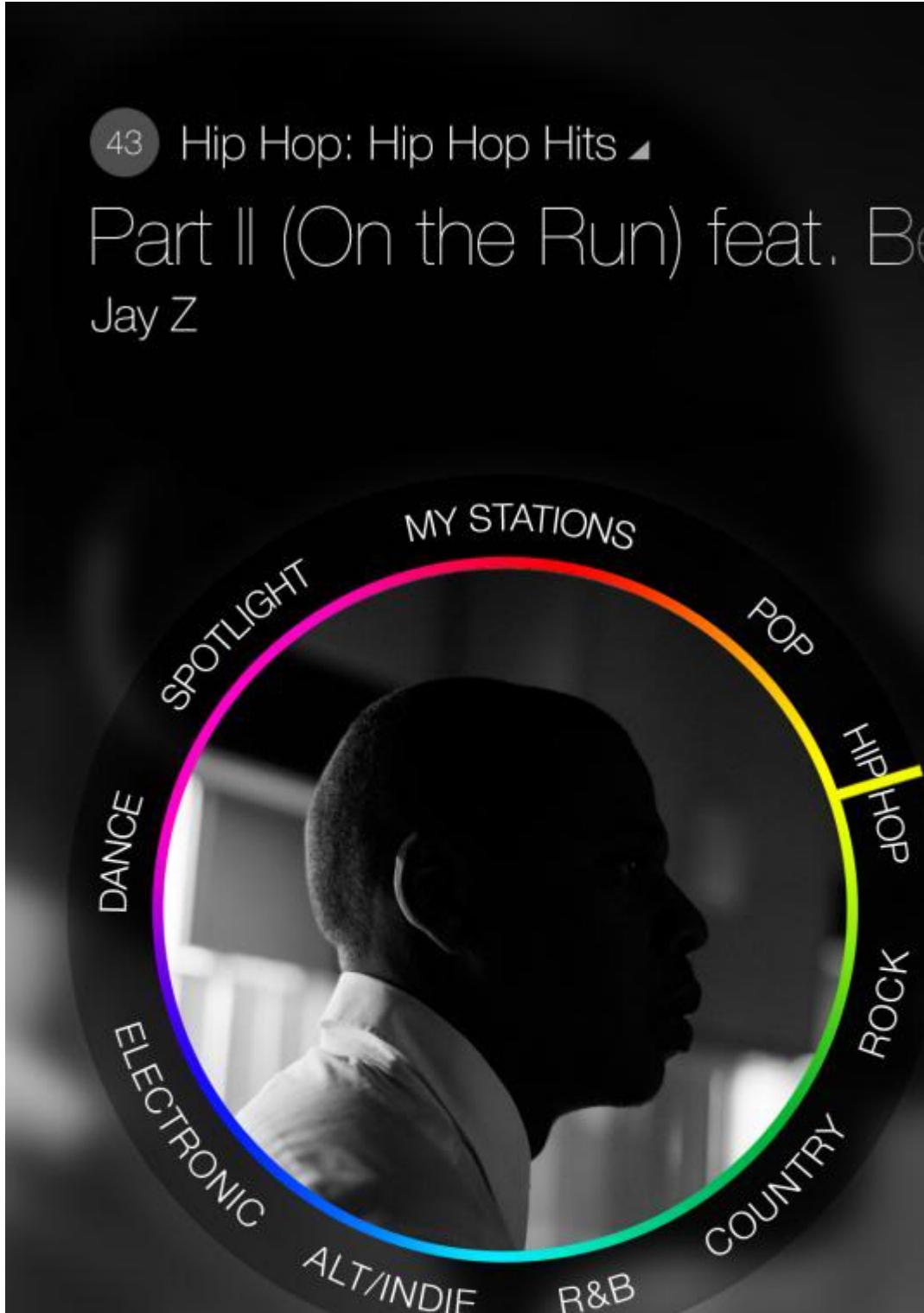
Remember when we told you that there would be [more to come on the Samsung Milk](http://coolkidstech.com/2014/07/samsung-galaxy-tablet-s-vs-ipad-air/) (<http://coolkidstech.com/2014/07/samsung-galaxy-tablet-s-vs-ipad-air/>)? Well, this is the pretty darn good. [Milk Music](http://www.samsung.com/us/showcase/milk/) (<http://www.samsung.com/us/showcase/milk/>) essentially takes the good things about online music streaming services into one nifty package. It's your radio station playing all the tunes you enjoy most without a single, pesky ad and it's totally free — but only if you're a Samsung owner, living in the U.S.

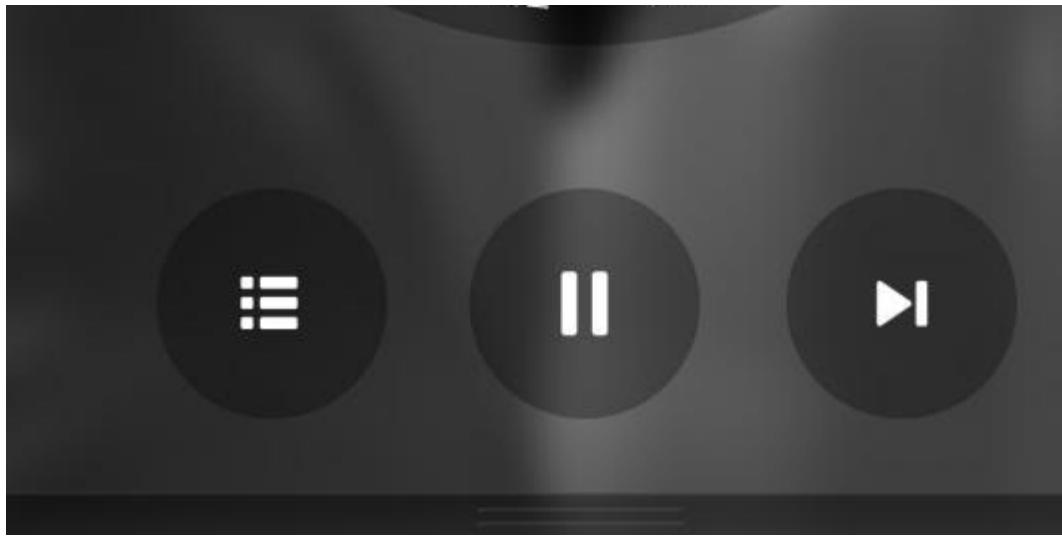
It's weird, right? To be saying: Sorry Apple users, this one ain't for you. But it's true; iOS users are definitely missing out on this cool, free internet radio situation. And it's pretty big deal.

All of Milk Music's 200-plus genre stations and library of over 13 million songs are powered by a wildly popular and extensive music service. The Milk Music app has already hit 1 million downloads since it only launched four months ago.



In addition to the freeness of it all, the app is super easy to use. I really like the clean design interface. With a quick tap on the drop-down menu, you can create a station by entering an artist or song. Then there's a cool Tuning Dial that you can customize by adding the nine genres to appear — everything from Alt/Indie and Chill to R&B and World music.





With the radio dial, you can slide between those selected genres, the stations you've created something called "Spotlight," which is exactly what it sounds like: the spot where you'll be in new music, what's trending, and first-listens. It's this Spotlight section that, according to the press release, you'll be able to hear curated songs and albums hand-picked by music industry tastemakers.

I found myself rolling through the circular dial like a kid in Mommy's desk chair. It's neat. I also you can manage and update your stations at any point. So if that draggy song you despise your Sia station, you can 86 it by tapping "Never Play Song" in sub menu. (It always makes me finite and serious the language can be on these things: *Never play that song ever again in my car* that you only get a maximum of six skips per station on the dial, and hitting "Never Play" counts that total.

Oh, and if you're wondering why the name Milk, as Samsung puts it: it's fresh and organic. I think this app get a thumbs-up from me, and I'll even let the naming thing slide.

Milk Music(<http://www.samsung.com/us/showcase/milk/>) streaming app is for free download on Google Play(https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.samsung.mdl.radio&referrer=utm_source%3D426utm_medium%3DWidgetWeb) for Samsung-only devices.

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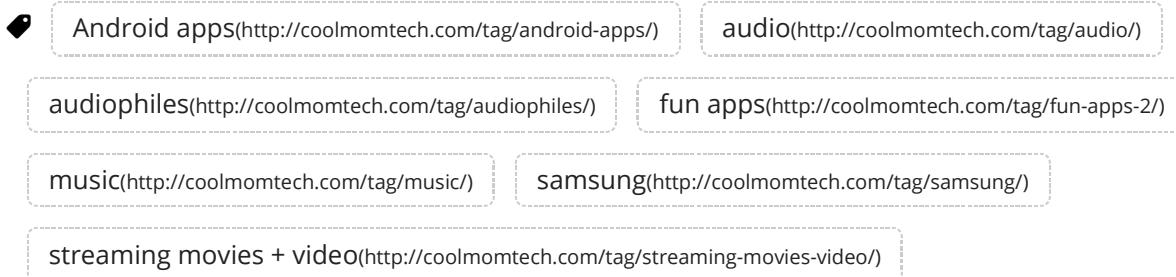
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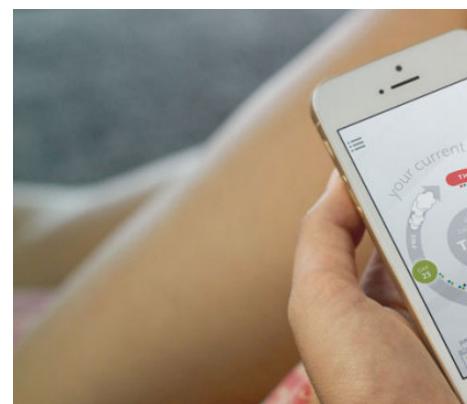
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